

HOME IS THE SAILOR

By BILL ADAMS

From Blue Book

I WAS sitting reading in the apprentices' quarters when I first saw him. It was the last night in port; the ship was going to sea in the early morning, and for once I was ready and willing for her to do so. The days of my four-year apprenticeship would soon be over. The three and a half years that lay behind me were none too pleasant to look back upon. She was a hungry ship, and ever since I joined her for my first voyage she had been in the west coast grain trade, making regular passages with general cargo round Cape Horn in June, July, or August, and returning to some European port in the latter part of the Northern winter. I had had my dose of it, and was eagerly looking forward to the end of one more passage, that I might leave her and go up for my second mate's certificate.

I was annoyed to see the youngster come into the half deck, for I had hoped to have the little room to myself for this last voyage. The apprentice with whom I had hitherto shared it had finished his four years and left her.

The newcomer was slight, rather tall and lanky, with dark eyes and straight black hair. His expression was very open and eager. A boy of about seventeen, he looked soft even for a first voyager. His delicate face was pink and clear, his hands white. He looked shy. One could easily see that he was a "gentleman's son." The tip of a white handkerchief showed in his breast pocket. He wore a white collar, white shirt, and dark silk tie. And of course he was dressed in the customary spanking rig of an unsophisticated and unsuspecting green sea apprentice—a double-breasted blue serge suit with two rows of big bright brass buttons, an anchor on each of them. A smart new "badge cap" topped him off—a round blue

cloth cap with a shiny black leather peak and gold chin stay, the company's house flag in the loop of the stay. I could have easily guessed what he afterward told me: he supposed this was to be the rig that he would wear at sea.

"Going to sea with her?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"Cut out the 'sir,'" said I, and went back to my reading. I must have looked a bit rough to him, for my old brass buttons were anything but bright, and I'd long ago lost the chin stay from my battered cap.

A longshore porter arrived with the kid's belongings, and I watched from the corner of my eye as he went to arranging them. When he had made up his bed in the bottom bunk with linen sheets, linen pillow case, and two or three fancy blankets, he strung up some photographs on the bulkhead about it—father, mother, and a good-looking sister. That done, he looked about the half deck with evident satisfaction. But when he caught my eye and I asked, "Why don't you hang yourself?" he gazed at me blankly, as though not sure that he had heard aright.

"My name's Chatters," said I. "What's yours?"

"Gillan, sir," he answered. Then, remembering that I had objected to "sir," he added, "Gillan. I beg your pardon."

I laughed. People on windjammers don't go around begging pardons.

"You'd better roll up those fancy sheets and stick 'em in the bottom of your sea chest," I said. "You'll find you can sleep without 'em."

He looked very surprised, and glanced at my own bunk with its rough old blankets thrown back, and a wisp of straw protruding from the edge of my ancient "donkey breakfast" mattress.

Preparing to turn in, I took off my worn apprentice uniform and laid it away in my sea chest, where it would remain until I needed it to go ashore in in 'Frisco. The morrow would be a long day, and I advised the kid to roll in. The last I saw of him before I fell asleep he was carefully folding his brass-bound suit and laying it out on the table.

When I awoke the night watchman was lighting our lamp. Day was just beginning to break. It was cold, and I snuggled down for a last few winks. The new chum turned out and

peered about the half deck as though seeking something. He gave me a long look, but supposing me to be asleep said nothing. I guessed what he was after; he was wondering where to wash his face and hands! Sea apprentices wash once a week at sea: on Saturday evening or on Sunday morning; unless it is bad weather, when such washing as they receive is attended to by the sea on the deck. Fresh water isn't plentiful. We take our fresh-water baths in the equatorial rain squalls.

In a moment the kid was dressing himself in his white shirt, collar, and brassbound suit. When dressed, he made up his bunk, shaking the pillow and straightening the sheets. Then he hurried out to the deck, bright-eyed and plainly much excited.

Someone came bellowing forward. The mate, who had been with her on her last voyage, was a quiet sort of man, the taciturn kind that you find in lots of ships—long ago grown accustomed to taking things as they come. The second mate was new. I had not yet seen him.

I was about to step from the half deck when I heard a shout.

"Get to blazes out o' the glad rags! D'ye think ye're a blasted ornymint?"

As Gillan hurriedly reëntered the half deck, half stepping, half falling over the door coaming, the second mate caught sight of me.

"Down to the locker, the two o' ye, an' look alive!" he growled; then went on forward to rouse out the foremast hands.

Gillan looked at me, speechless. I said, "We've a little job to do. Better get a move on and change into dungarees."

When you read of the sailing of a ship you read of the folks ashore who wave and cheer while the sailors wave and cheer back. Flags fly gaily in the offshore wind. The crew stamps round and round the windlass, singing: "*There's plenty of gold, so I've been told, on the banks of the Sacramento,*" or, "*Waye, aye, you rolling river!*" You never hear tell of the chain locker.

The morning was just opening. Gulls wheeled by. The river glistened. The tugboat lay ahead, waiting till our anchor was aweigh.

The hands at the windlass were rousing up a chantey as I lighted a lantern and led the new chum, now dressed in dun-

garees and a work shirt, below to the 'tween decks. It was dark down there. The singing of the men on the fo'c'sle head grew faint and far away. I wriggled backward through the manhole in the forward bulkhead, and he followed me awkwardly.

It was pitch dark in the chain locker; utterly quiet. There was a stale, dank smell of old rust. We were far below the level of the river.

Passing the new chum a chain hook, I bade him grab hold of the incoming cable and help me flake it down as it clanked in. As he set his chain hook in the chain he looked up to the blackness above, and a dollop of mud fell in his face. Muddy water dripped on him. He was much too uncomfortable, much too perplexed, to ask any questions. The iron chain hook was hurting his hands. I guessed that lacing his own shoe-strings was about the hardest work that he had hitherto done.

When the cable was all in and I led the way back to the deck it was raining. There was no longer any blue sky to be seen. The tugboat had dropped us, and we were on the road to 'Frisco. The shore line, already indistinct, was fast fading. The wind was cold. In oilskins and sea boots the men were hurrying from rope to rope while the second mate bellowed orders. Some were aloft on the yards, loosing sail.

As I hopped into the shrouds to go up and lend a hand on the main I had a good look at the second mate. He was a big, shock-headed, bulgy-eyed man, and although without oilskins or sea boots and already wet through was apparently quite unconscious of either cold or wet. Catching sight of the new chum he shouted to Gillan to jump aloft; but after watching his clumsy efforts to get into the rigging bawled, "Get down! Get down! Ye'll break yer blasted neck!" He pointed Gillan to where the men were hauling out on the topsail chain sheets, and bade him lay back with them.

The rain came down harder; the wind piped up. She began to roll a little. By the time I came down from aloft she was lying over, tossing up a smother at her bow. The new chum was wet through and shivering. His palms were badly blistered. I, too, was wet through, of course. But I was well used to that.

At close to eight bells, breakfast time, I was working beside the new chum. "Hungry?" I asked. I knew well enough he was hungry. He was almost everything that was miserable—but not quite everything as yet. And she was rolling so now

that he couldn't stand without holding on to something.

When he followed me to the half deck at eight bells I saw that his brassbound suit had fallen to the deck, and I picked it up and tossed it into his bunk.

"You'll want that when you go ashore in 'Frisco," I told him. He didn't hear me. He had dropped to a seat on his sea chest.

For breakfast there was of course the usual thing—hardtack and strong bitter coffee. Sorry for the kid, I poured him a pannikin full.

"Drink hearty," said I. "You've four giddy years of it ahead."

He lifted the pannikin and tried to drink. But he'd been accustomed to good coffee, with sugar and cream in it. His face turned suddenly green, and he rose and hurried to the deck. When he came back the rain was driving down in sheets. At my advice he managed to change into dry things and to get into his oilskins and sea boots. His oilskins were good. But someone had sold him a pair of felt-lined sea boots—once wet, never dry—articles of use, perhaps, to steamer men or yachtsmen, who do not often get their sea boots full of water. Too seasick to attempt to eat, he crept into his bunk, his brassbound suit crumpled beneath him.

In ten minutes or so the second mate appeared and ordered us out. By now the seas were lopping in over her bulwarks and water flowed to and fro with every roll.

"You'll soon get used to it," I told the kid. "The first year's the worst." Tailing on to a rope beside him, I showed him how to use his weight. "It won't be so hard on your hands if you use your weight right. There's a right way and a wrong way of pulling on a rope," I said.

He looked at me gratefully. His body was now protected from the wind by the new oilskins, so that he was hot instead of cold. His pale face was sweaty. But as we gave her more sail she grew wetter and before long he was knocked down and bowled over by a sea, and so was wet through again.

Hour after weary hour went by, every minute one of acute discomfort. The shore was long lost to view. A gray rain-hid sea tossed all about.

The carpenter looked from his shop door and called to the second mate, "She's getting a good start, Mister."

"Aye," replied the second, knee deep in white water. "Five months o' this an' we'll see . . . 'Frisco."

When we went below for a rest at noon the seasickness was scared out of the lad and he was ravenously hungry. There was hardtack and a hunk of fatty pork for dinner. He gulped down his share of the pork, tried to nibble a pantile, and crawled into his bunk. I had to shout and to shake him to awaken him when the turn-to bell struck at one o'clock.

Afternoon passed as the forenoon had passed. I was at the wheel, and saw him from time to time, floundering about the watery decks at the heels of the men, or helplessly clinging to a hand rail in the swirl of white water. It was six o'clock before we were below again. Hardtack and skilly for supper. The latter, though supposed to be tea, bore slight resemblance to tea. The new chum drank a pannikin of skilly, ate a couple of pantiles, and once more made for his bunk. The wind howled, the sea roared, but he knew nothing of them.

While the kid slept the second mate came into the half deck and asked me for a fill of 'baccy. "'Bout out of your time, ain't you?" he asked me. He had seen that I was no green hand. I saw that for all his noise and bluster he had a kindly eye. There was no bully about him. He was merely a sailing-ship second mate who when there was work to be done liked to have it done and be through with it. When he rose to go he stopped by the new chum's bunk, and fingering a corner of a linen sheet shook his head unbelievably.

When I roused the kid at eight bells, two hours later, wind and sea were gone down, and the ship was riding easy with a slow gentle roll. The night was very dark and a light steady rain was falling. I took him to the quarter deck where, by the light of a lantern, the mates were picking the men into two watches. That done and the wheel relieved, the second mate called to Gillan, "Get up to the poop and keep the time!"

Remembering my own first night at sea, I felt sorry for the new chum. Having to watch the clock and strike the bell every half hour there would be no chance for him to snatch sleep. Should he happen to snooze, so that the bell was not struck and the man at the wheel not relieved on the tick of ten o'clock, not the second mate only, but the men, too, would be growling at him.

He struck the bell all right till nine-thirty. It was my wheel

at ten, and I went up a minute or two ahead of time, in case he should be asleep. Asleep he was, on his feet, his head tucked down in his breast. Water dripped on him from the spanker, but he was unaware of it. I woke him, and as he went to strike four bells I heard the water squelching in his sea boots. It was very cold.

Until midnight he leaned against the wheel box behind me and snoozed. Whenever I thought it about time to strike the bell I poked him with the toe of my boot.

At midnight we went below to the half deck together. Probably no featherbed had ever seemed so good to him as that narrow little bunk had now become.

When the second mate's watch was roused out again at four of the morning and he had to go back to the poop to keep the time till beginning of the day's work at five o'clock, he could hardly keep his eyes open. His fingers trembled as he slowly dressed. The linings of his sea boots were sodden. He gasped as he put his bunk-warmed feet down into them.

I didn't see him again till breakfast time. Then, when I entered the half deck, he was folding his brassbound suit and laying it away in the bottom of his sea chest. He didn't ask any questions.

Days and nights passed. Night after night he huddled on the poop, keeping the time. Day by day in his watch on deck he worked at dull jobs: polishing brasswork and binnacles over and over till they shone like mirrors. Hour after hour, kneeling on the hard deck, he chipped rust from bolts and bollards. Always when his time came to go off duty he crawled into his bunk to be dead to the world for the brief three and three quarters hours of a sailing-ship sailor's watch below. In the dog watches of an evening, busily preparing for my second mate's examination, I had small time to notice or to talk with him.

Disconsolate and solitary as the new chum was, he began to harden. His blistered hands healed slowly. The skin on his palms and fingers grew tougher. Forced to it by the unceasing invective of the second mate, he learned to walk and to run without holding on, and became accustomed to the clumsy weight of oilskins and sea boots. Lean as he had been when he first came aboard, he was leaner now. The brightness was gone from his eyes; the expectancy passed. Always too tired,

too wretched for thought, he was frequently bowled over and soaked to the bone by boarding seas.

For two weeks we sailed rough waters beneath a cloud-billowed sky. The lad's fancy blankets were salty and damp; his linen sheets had been put away. When occasionally one or other of the mates dropped in to the half deck of an evening, and, bending over my shoulder, helped me with "day's work" and "longitude by chronometer" problems, neither of them spoke to or noticed Gillan.

By and by the sun came out and the sea shone blue. Wet clothing was hung to dry. Men with worn oilskins begged the mate for a little linseed oil to dress them with. Sea boots were given a dressing of dubbin.

One of the foremost hands who had an old and leaky pair of sea boots saw the new chum's felt-lined boots laid out to dry in the sun and offered a trade.

"I'll give ye a week's whack o' pork for them boots," he said.

Gillan, always hungry, made the trade, and thereafter for a week had a double whack of pork at dinnertime. When the week was gone he was hungrier than ever and took to hanging around the galley door in the dog watch, hoping for scraps from the cook. I warned him that he'd find himself in trouble if the skipper saw him sponging on the cook, but my warning was futile. So one evening the skipper saw him eating cabin scraps by the galley door, and from then on he found himself kept at work in the dog watch every evening for a week. The men snickered at sight of the kid chipping iron rust and polishing brass long after the sun was gone.

"Well, I warned you, didn't I?" I said. He made no reply, but I saw a momentary new expression come to his face. Hot, angry sparks awakened in his eyes.

After the dog watch was his own again he tightened his belt and kept away from the galley. The pinkness was gone from his cheeks. His hands were stained and grimy. Often there was a queer, far-away look to him. He spoke only when spoken to. The shyness that had been so noticeable when first I saw him was still there. Looking back, I remember a sort of dignity in that shyness.

I worked with the foremast sailors, all of whom were busied in the rigging, reeving, splicing, and getting everything in

trim for the Southern latitudes. Ignorant of all sailor work, the new chum was kept at his chipping and polishing, working all alone.

Leaving the trade winds astern, we ran into blowy latitudes again, and, with no sea boots now, Gillan's feet were always wet. The fellow who had traded for his felt-lined boots had ripped the linings out and went dry shod.

"Where's your sea boots?" the second mate asked him; and, hearing that he had traded them for food, told him that he was a young fool and must take his medicine.

"The skipper's got sea boots in the slop chest. He'll sell you a pair," I told him. Evidently remembering the time when the skipper had seen him accepting scraps from the cook, he reddened and made no answer.

One evening shortly afterward a stiff squall caught her just after nightfall, and all hands were called to shorten sail in a hurry. Gillan and I climbed to the main royal. No sound reached us but the sound of wind and sea as we swung up the rolling rigging. He had never been aloft, never been off the deck before. The moon beamed on roaring waters.

When I had secured my own side of the sail I went over to help him.

"How d'you like *sailing*?" I shouted.

His eyes very bright, he glanced at me from amid folds of white billowing canvas. His cap had blown away and the wind tossed his black hair about his pale forehead. He made no reply, but while I passed the gaskets and lashed down the sail he stood erect on the foot rope and gazed up to the full round moon above us. His lips were parted. His face delighted and eager, he drank deep of the crisp wind.

When I came down into the topmast rigging he was still standing at the royal mast head, gazing now skyward, now to the glistening crested seas almost two hundred feet below.

The second mate looked up from the topsail yard.

"D'ye think ye're a blasted ornymint?" he bellowed.

His sensitive face white, his eyes gone dull, the new chum came into the half deck looking as though someone had struck him. The blustering ways of second mates had never troubled me. To me, long ago disillusioned, the sea was merely a means to a living. Nothing more.

"It's no use to carry a grouch," I told him, and added, "You

can swallow the anchor when she gets in if you want to."

"What's that?" he asked, frowning.

"Skip," said I. "Desert. Run away. Lots of us do."

As I brought out my navigation books I said, "When I came to sea I supposed that all I'd have to do would be to walk up and down in my brass buttons with a big telescope under my arm."

He made no answer, and I went to my reading and figures.

He had taken off his boots and was chafing his cold feet with equally cold hands.

"See here, kid," I said, "you can't go around the corner without any sea boots."

As though he had not heard me, he remarked, "I thought that too."

"Thought what?" I asked.

"About the brass buttons and the telescope," he answered.

"Lots of us do," I replied, laughing. "I don't know who started the idea."

"*They* thought it too," said he, and nodded to the pictures of his people.

"You'd better go ask the skipper for a pair of sea boots," I said.

"I won't!" he snapped, the angry sparks awakening in his eyes again.

I shrugged my shoulders; I wasn't the little beggar's keeper.

The big winds blew unceasingly. Each day was drearier than the last. The weather was too wild for chipping iron rust or polishing brasswork now. Seas slapped their crests across the bulwarks. Her head sails dripped. Lifelines were stretched from fo'c'sle to poop, and all hands were set to making ro-bands and chafing mats beneath the cold shelter of the fo'c'sle head. The men talked of stormy latitudes ahead, and spoke of missing ships, and ice on wintry seas.

"Here's him as'll not take no more voyages to sea, I'll bet," said one, turning to the new chum. They snickered at the new chum, while day after day the rain and sleet drove down. . . .

There came a still day when the large slow-floating snow-flakes fell, and men with blue noses stamped their feet and beat numb hands upon their oilskins. The second mate bawled:

"Get them brooms along now! Shovel the snow off her!"

The kid's teeth chattered as he flung snow over the bulwarks. No sail flapped. No block creaked. Monotonous mutterings came from the men. Now and again, with a great beating of many-jointed wings, a bird rose from the dark water, flew a little way, and settled with a splash. The second mate, petting the ship's dog in the chartroom doorway, saw Gillan watching the birds. The kid's face was rapt—everything forgotten but the great white birds.

"Get the snow off her!" shouted the second. "D'ye think this is a blasted picnic?"

The sleek dog came from the chartroom and strolled about the poop, indifferent eyes upon the new chum as it passed him.

The skipper came from the cabin and called to the steward on the quarter deck, "Fix a good supper for old Ranzo, steward! It's hard weather on a dog." He noticed the kid, and reëntered the cabin, to be back in a moment with a pair of sea boots.

"Here, you, boy!" he called, and tossing the sea boots to the deck returned below.

Gillan's blue lips were voiceless as he picked up the sea boots. A tantalizing smell of hot food came from the pantry. Whining and wagging its tail, the dog passed down the companion ladder to the saloon where mate and skipper sat down to their suppers.

It was almost dark. Now and again a bird cry broke the silence.

When we went to the half deck for our supper of hardtack and skilly there was a sound as of many cattle lowing far away and coming slowly nearer. We were eating our hardtack and sipping the thin hot skilly when the wind caught her.

From that night on there was small time for talk or for books of an evening. There was no roband making by day. In brief lulls of almost ceaseless storm we snatched what sleep we might. Again and again rang the order, "*All hands on deck!*" Again and again at the changing of the watches one or other of the mates called, "Turn in all standing! Keep handy the watch!" Time after time we turned in "all standing"; sleeping in our oilskins and sea boots, lest a sudden call come. After a week of steady gales two of the crew laid up, and,

moaning in their bunks, feigned sickness to escape the misery of the deck.

Aloft in furious days and hooting midnights, cold and wet were the unremitting round of all but the two malingerers. Rope-toughened skin on palms split open. Finger joints cracked, the red flesh showing at the bottom of the cracks. For want of anything better we rubbed pork grease on our "sea cuts." I taught the new chum to tie rope yarns round his wrists and waist and ankles—"soul and body lashings"—to help keep the flooding water out. But still he was always wet. Salt-water boils swelled on his wrists, just where the chafe of the cold stiff oilskin came. "Wait till you get 'em on your knees," said I. For I was limping. Our bedding was wet, our mattresses mouldering; the great seas swamped in whenever a door was opened for the fraction of a moment. There were days when we must do without our coffee or our skilly. Days when the sole food available was hardtack.

How Gillan managed to exist during the three full weeks we spent in beating round the corner I don't know. One looked after one's self. Often I caught glimpses of him clinging to the lifelines, waist deep in white smother. Once I saw one of the crew jerk him from the onrush of a sea just in time to save him from being swept overboard.

The second mate had no time to notice the new chum now. Had he stayed in his bunk no one would have cared or have missed him. But again and again I found him beside me, aloft on racking topsail yards where none but tried men could be of any use. His lips numb, his face ghostly white, his bruised knuckles raw and red, he did his best at fisting frozen canvas with the rest of us. . . .

When misery was become well-nigh our second nature, there came at last a clear morning with a light wind from the south. She was past the corner! By breakfast-time we had given her full sail, for the first time in over a month. Countless birds about her, she lifted to the gentle undulations of a southerly swell. The word went round that there would be no work that day.

Some of the men were watching the birds. Some hung wet clothes to dry. I was seated on the hatch, Gillan beside me washing his salt-water boils in a pannikin of fresh water, when the second mate passed by.

I guessed his errand, for on his face was such a contemptuous scowl as he had never worn when savage winds were choking and wintry waters pounding him. A moment after he had entered the fo'c'sle the two malingerers were hurled from it and fell sprawling to the deck. They were speedily booted to their feet. His sea-split hands clamped about their necks. Barefooted, bareheaded, dressed in their underclothing only, their eyes bulging, their lips whimpering, he pushed them before him with extended arms and so brought them to the cabin door. Presently they returned forward and slunk into the fo'c'sle, their rating reduced from "able-bodied" to "ordinary" seamen, their pay cut down.

The crew were gathered by the fo'c'sle door, jeering the malingerers, when the second mate once more came forward. Stopping in front of Gillan, he looked at the new chum's miserable hands.

"How d'ye like the sea?" he asked. Before the kid could answer the second turned to me.

"The skipper wants ye aft," said he.

My sea cuts and salt-water boils were instantly forgotten, for now I remembered that this was the day on which my four-year apprenticeship was over. The second mate strolled after me as I made haste toward the cabin door.

I left the cabin gleefully. The mates were talking by the quarter rail, and I told them that the skipper had signed me on as third and had told me to bring my things aft. Henceforth I was to share the second mate's room, eat at the cabin table, and draw pay.

My first job as third mate was to order the malingerers from the fo'c'sle and set them to work upon their hands and knees scouring the decks where constant inflooding water had caused the slippery green sea growths to obtain a hold. Hate me as they might, they dared not grumble. While no one else worked that day, they pushed flat sandstones to and fro, bucket of water beside each of them to keep the stones wet.

While the second mate and I were seated together on the after hatch Gillan passed by. I was removing the old apprentice buttons from my shore-going jacket.

"Four giddy years and you can do the same," I said as the new chum glanced at me.

"I'll bet ye dollars to doughnuts he swallows the anchor,"

muttered the second mate; the kid, overhearing the words, blushed crimson.

Next day the crew were set to sailor work in the rigging. But the new chum was given a bucket of water and a holystone and put to scouring the deck beside the two malingerers. They knelt in a row together.

Working in contented twos and threes, the sailors talked while they worked. When none of the mates were near the two malingerers muttered to each other, cursing the mates and ship, and leering at Gillan.

"You was a blasted fool to go to sea, wasn't you, puppy?" said one.

Gillan pretended not to hear. The fellows swore at him and taunted him, sneering at him because the sandstone pained his split hands. He took no notice of them.

While everyone else's hands healed the new chum's hands remained sore—chafed by the stone and continually dipped in salt water. Day by day the malingerers jeered him, calling him foul names, and damning him as one who in days to come would be an officer.

Weeks passed. We picked up a warm southeast trade wind. All but the three holystoners were busy painting the ship. We were counting the days to 'Frisco.

Evening by evening I worked at my navigation problems in the room I shared with the second. The new chum dwelt alone in the half deck, with his salt pork, hardtack, bitter coffee, and thin brown skilly. And the pictures of his people hung on the bulkhead.

On a warm Sunday such of the crew as possessed any brought out their shore-going clothes to give them an airing.

Gillan was hanging his brassbound suit to air as I passed.

"Going to wear 'em when she gets in?" I asked.

He understood my meaning—knew that I was wondering whether he had made up his mind to swallow the anchor. His lips parted, he turned sharply round, as though about to speak. But he was silent. I saw sparks waken in his dark eyes once more.

As I strolled away to my room the two malingerers came from the fo'c'sle, and, seeing the new chum brushing his brassbound jacket, nudged each other.

In the second dog watch that day the second told me to get

the kid to the wheel and show him how to steer. I found him in the half deck, seated at the table, with paper before him and pen in hand. We should be in in a few weeks, and he was writing home—to the people whose pictures smiled on us from the bulkhead. I wondered of what miseries he was telling. The men were singing in the fo’c’sle as he followed me aft. The malingerers walked the fore deck together. The mates sat talking quietly on the after hatch. The sleek dog dozed near by.

With a soft beam wind just keeping her sails full, she scarcely needed steering, and I left her to him. The rosy sunset shone on his thin white face. The sails glowed above him; the sea glowed below. The second mate called up to me where I sat on the taffrail: “It won’t be long now till we take a walk ashore!”

The sun went down. The sea rippled and sang under her counter, beneath her helmsman’s feet. The moon rose in the gloomy east. Stars winked amid slow-moving little clouds.

His hands on her wheel spokes, the binnacle light shining on his down-bent face, the new chum seemed almost a spectral boy.

I was standing at the door of the carpenter’s shop talking with Chips, when the new chum was relieved and went forward. The moon shone bright on deckhouse and on deck. A murmur of talk and snatches of laughter came from the fo’c’sle.

As Gillan passed me I heard a harsh laugh on the fore deck. A sneering voice said, “Ye looks as good in ’em as the puppy’ll ever look!”

The new chum started, then stopped. For an instant he stood still. As he sprang forward I followed.

Beside the hatch stood one of the malingerers with Gillan’s brassbound jacket on. Catching sight of Gillan, he threw the jacket off and tossed it to him.

“’Ere, puppy!” he sneered.

The jacket fell to the deck. It was I who picked it up. As I did so I heard the sharp click of a fist upon bone. The fellow who had been wearing the jacket snapped out a foul oath.

The crew came streaming from the fo’c’sle. Chips hurried from his shop, the cook from his galley. Gillan was on his back on the deck, but for an instant only.

As the new chum staggered backward and went down again, the second mate strode up.

"Back—back, all hands!" he ordered.

A cry of delight came from the crew as the new chum, head down and shoulders hunched, leaped for his antagonist. But as the fellow's fist beat the youngster down for a third time they made as though to close in. Growling, "*Back! Back! Back!*" the second mate flung them away.

The malingerer glanced quickly round the circle of onlookers. His lip was bleeding, and as Gillan rose once more he backed, shifty-eyed, to the bulwarks behind him. The new chum's face was the colour of chalk. Sparks blazed in his eyes.

A knife flashed in the moonlight. A yell rose from the men. But the second mate's hand clamped on the malingerer's wrist and the blade whirled overboard.

"Back! All hands stand back!" ordered the second, and waved the incrowding onlookers away.

Ducking his head and throwing his arms up wildly, the fellow sought ineffectually to guard himself. A hoot of laughter rose. His hands upheld before his frightened face, he leaped away from Gillan, blundered blindly through the cheering crew, and was gone, followed by a bellow of laughter and oaths.

For an instant Gillan stood white and panting, the men about him, the second mate's approving hand upon his shoulder. . . .

The moon went out. A squall piped through the rigging. Dimly seen sails bellied drum-tight, and as the ship reeled down the mate's and skipper's voices rang above the sudden tumult. All hands ran to the gear. While the ship raced toward 'Frisco we lowered and clued up sail, shortening her down in a hurry as squall upon staggering squall burst upon her.

Men who swung upon the foot ropes gathering in her canvas shouted jocosely to one another, jesting of the fight. Snatches of laughter sounded from the swaying spars.

Cloud fringes parted, and the moon rode out. The sea twinkled and shimmered, high crests snowy, curves molten, hollows cavern-inky.

Jesting as they descended toward the deck, the men in the main topmast rigging cried up to Gillan above them, telling him he'd make a bucko mate some day—calling him "*sailor*." They told me afterward how his face shone, how his dark eyes danced.

At the moment that the new chum was coming down over the futtock shrouds the second mate looked up and saw a gasket hanging loose upon the lee main yard.

"One o' you sailors lay out on the main yard an' make that gasket up," he shouted.

A fresh squall smothered the moon. Sea and sky were darkened. Laughter and cheers were mingled with the night's roar.

The second mate's watch went below, the mate's men to coiling up the tangled ropes. As the full force of the wind took her and she lay far over, spray flying thick and her lee bulwark down in the water, I went to my room.

I had kicked off my boots and was half undressed when a wild cry from the dark deck beside the lee main braces startled me. As man after man took up and repeated that cry I burst through the alleyway door and sprang half naked to the night again. The wind howled. Battering seas smashed on her hidden hatches. Sheets of invisible water flew over ship and crew. Voices were drowned. Ripped from its bolt ropes, I heard a sail whip into ribbons high above me. Chains clattered on the metal masts. Wind upon wind. Water waist deep, shoulder high. Confusion. Skipper, mates, and sailors, impotent to save. It was no night to put a boat out!

The squall passed. Cloud fringes parted and the moon broke out. The sea twinkled and shimmered, its high crests snowy, its curves molten, its hollows cavern-inky.

Morning opened clear. Full sail by breakfast time, the ship racing for port.

The mate beckoned me, and together we went to the half deck to gather the new chum's belongings. His oilskins swung on their hook. Fallen to the deck, his pannikin rolled to and fro. A letter lay upon the little table. From the bulkhead above his fancy blankets his people smiled on us.

We took his oilskins down and rolled his blankets. We laid

his people's pictures where they could not see us, within his sea chest on his gay brass-buttoned suit. The second mate came in as we were done.

The mate picked up the unsealed letter. The same thought was in the mind of each of us: The tale of all his misery would be there; hunger and cold, and three hard, heedless men. Either one of us, all of us, might have made the misery less!

The second mate and I looked at the mate; he gazed back at us.

"*You*," he muttered, and thrust the letter toward me.

I read, aloud at first—then scarce whispering: . . . "They say the first year is the hardest. *It is not hard*. . . I'll soon be home."